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LATE PHOTOGRAPHY, MILITARY LANDSCAPES AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

Simon Faulkner

Abstract

This essay considers the photographic genre of 'late photography' that has emerged roughly over the last two decades. Late photographs picture material remains left in the aftermath of events that often involve forms of violence. These photographs are usually high in detail, but formally simple, framing aftermath sites in ways that suggest the reservation of judgement and commentary upon the things they picture. This gives the impression that such photographs are intended to distance the spectator from the political meanings of the events or situations to which they refer. The discussion presented in the essay suggests that it is this apparent distancing from the political that opens up possibilities for the imaginative rethinking of how the past might function in relation to the politics of the present. The essay explores these concerns through the discussion of photographs by Simon Norfolk, Angus Boulton, Gilad Ophir and Roi Kuper, in relation to two historical and political contexts: the Cold War, considered briefly in relation to Boulton's work and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, considered more extensively in relation to the work of Norfolk, Ophir, and Kuper.

Keywords: late photography, military landscape, politics, memory, Cold War, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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Biographical note

Simon Faulkner is the programme leader in art history at Manchester Metropolitan University. His current research is focussed on relationships between visual representation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This research has involved collaborative work with visual practitioners, for example, *Between States*, a book developed with the Israeli artist David Reeb, will be published in late 2014. He is also a co-investigator on 'Picturing the Social', an ESRC-funded research project on social media images.

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LATE PHOTOGRAPHY, MILITARY LANDSCAPES AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

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Late photography

The last two decades, or so has seen the emergence of a genre of photography that pictures the effects of historical events and processes on landscape and the built environment. Termed 'late photography' by David Company (2003, 2006 and 2007, p.27), this type of photograph often addresses the traces of violent or catastrophic events, such as disasters, terrorism, and warfare, as well as picturing moribund military sites. Examples of this kind of photograph are Richard Misrach's images of the Bravo 20 U.S. Navy bombing range in Nevada, taken in the second half of the 1980s (Misrach, 1990), Paul Seawright, Brian McKee, and Simon Norfolk's pictures of Afghanistan after the Allied invasion in 2001 (Seawright, 2003; Poller, 2006; Norfolk, 2002), and Donovan Wylie's photographs of the disused Maze Prison near Belfast, taken between 2002 and 2003 (Wylie, 2004). Such images are doubly removed from the events and processes to which they inevitably refer. In Company's words, late photographs are 'not so much the trace of an event as the *trace of the trace of an event*.' (Company, 2003, p.124) These pictures of the detritus left behind by conflict refer to absence as much as presence and, because of this, are inextricably linked to issues of memory.

Dubravka Ugrešić has observed that memory 'is a fishnet with a very small catch and with the water gone' (Ugrešić, 1996a, p.55). Late photography pictures the kinds of remnant that constitute this 'small catch' of memory. Such photographs bring us face-to-face with the *otherness* of the past as something that cannot be grasped in its full complexity. Late photographs can therefore function as metaphors for our relationship to the past. A particularly strong example of this is Anthony Haughey's photograph *Destroyed Files, Bosnia Herzegovina*, taken in 1999 (Haughey, 2006, p.33). All that remains of the files in the photograph is ash and rusted lever-arch mechanisms strewn across an area of rough ground. We are faced with the impossibility of ever knowing what the burnt files contained. Haughey's photograph therefore presents us with an example of how late photography pictures the destruction

of the products of human culture that embody collective memories. The photograph also suggests the war against memory that accompanied the ethnic cleansing that was a key aspect of the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Thought about in these terms, the picture might be related to Ugrešić's notion of the 'confiscation of memory' articulated in reaction to the policies of strategic forgetting pursued by the nationalist states that replaced the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Ugrešić, 1996b). The late photograph can therefore alert us to the fragility and threatened condition of memory, functioning both as a vector of memory and something that brings the possibility of remembrance into question.

Linked to the relationship between the late photograph and memory is the matter-of-fact approach this kind of photography takes to aftermath sites. Buildings and other objects are often depicted from the front and positioned in the centre of the image. Objects and surrounding landscapes are rendered in extreme detail often using large format cameras. An emphasis is placed upon the picturing of material structures and topographical minutiae. These strategies (though not the pictorial scale of many late photographs) have precedents in photographs of architectural structures by Walker Evans, Bernard and Hillier Becher, and in the 'New Topographics' photography produced by Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams in the 1970s. Words used by John Szarkowski to describe Evan's approach could be applied to late photography, 'puritanically economical, precisely measured, frontal, unemotional, dryly textured ... [and] insistently factual' (cited in Highnam, 1981, p.6). Like these photographic approaches, late photography also shuns the picturing of people and, with this, the connotations of action and narrative that the presence of people suggests. These are consequently emphatically still images. To use Peter Wollen's contrast between film as 'fire' and photography as 'ice' (2003), late photographs are some of the most 'frozen' of contemporary photographs (Company, 2003, p.124; Wollen, 1997, p.30). The formal simplicity combined with the absence of people in such photographs affirms the sense of witnessing sites after events have occurred, as if the pictured location has been removed from the flow of history and relocated in a timeless realm of memory. Vilém Flusser has pointed out that photography in general allows one to "'take" something from the stream of history' (2006, p.6), yet with late photography this is a double effect: the stillness of the aftermath site is combined with the still image.

The formal simplicity adopted by practitioners of late photography also suggests that they have tried to avoid

encoding their images with overt connotations. To avoid connotation through formal strategies is impossible. As W.J.T. Mitchell observes: 'Connotation goes all the way down to the roots of the photograph, to the motives for its production, to the selection of its subject matter, to the choice of angles and lighting' (1994, p.284). Formal simplicity has its own connotations: the very connotations that Szarkowski ascribes to Evans' work, such as a lack of emotion and an insistent factual orientation. Formal choices necessarily create meanings. Nevertheless, late photographs often seem far removed from the kind of documentary photography associated with Cartier-Bresson's notion of the 'decisive' storytelling moment and kind of war pictures that Roland Barthes described as being loaded with 'over-explicit instructions for reading' ([1969] 1999, p.32). This is not to suggest that a complete division can always be drawn between late photography and photojournalistic images. Photographs of the remains of violent events without figures are used in the press. As John Taylor observes: 'The gory aftermath is not at all an unusual subject for press photography' (1998, p.88). When compared to such images, late photography does not seem to be so different from press photography. However the key comparison between late photography and photojournalism involves a contrast between photographs of aftermath sites and photographs involving a frozen instance in a sequence of human action; instances framed in such a way that they tell a story, or provide key information about a social, or political situation. In contrast to such images, late photography appears to be marked by an avoidance of instruction; it seems to 'present' and 'record' rather than 'comment'. All photographs are open to interpretation, but as Company observes, because of this avoidance of instruction, late photography constitutes 'the radically open image par excellence' (2003, p.126).

Simon Norfolk's photograph of the remains of Israeli buses blown up by suicide bombers at the back of the bus garage at Kiryat Ata is a good example of this kind of openness.¹ The photograph pictures the remains of three destroyed buses that have been lined up next to each other. Norfolk set up his camera just to the right of the nearest bus so that its front is almost head-on to the viewer and so that the full length of the second bus can be seen. Because the second bus is just a skeleton, the third bus can be seen through its remains. This third bus has no roof, while the roof of the nearest bus has been blasted out of shape by an explosion. What

are we to make of Norfolk's act of photographing these remains? Is he presenting the bombed buses in sympathy with Israeli victims of Palestinian terror, or is it more likely that he intended the photograph to signify a general opposition to political violence in the context of Israel/Palestine? The only clear answer we can give to these questions is that the photograph alone provides no indication of the intentions of the photographer in terms of moral and political meaning. Clearly, the image has considerable metaphoric potential, but the difference between it and many press photographs is that there seems to be much less of an attempt to use the framing of the image to pre-define what it should be metaphorically seen as.

One effect of Norfolk's photograph is that the blown up buses appear removed from the rhetorical contest in which different political agents have used actual destroyed buses, or representations of such destruction as symbols of Israeli vulnerability to terrorism, on the one hand, and Palestinian resistance to the occupation, on the other. For example, in 2004 the Jerusalem Municipality placed the remains of a bombed Egged bus against the West Bank Wall at Abu Dis to demonstrate the security function of this structure, while Hamas demonstrations in Nablus in 2000 and Gaza City in 2003 involved the burning of mock Israeli buses as simulations of suicide attacks. The civilian bus has therefore become a political symbol through its incorporation into demonstrations that are in turn visualised by the media. Company has suggested that late photography runs the risk of generating melancholy and numbness amongst its viewers. Thus he observes that the late photograph 'can also foster an indifference and political withdrawal that masquerades as concern. Mourning by association becomes merely an aestheticized response' (Company, 2003, p.132). Similarly the Israeli photographer Miki Kratsman has argued that the formal characteristics of this kind of photograph do not lend themselves to political engagement, stating, 'sometimes you show and you hide in the same frame, there you do not have to take any responsibility, or political position on your work' (Kratsman, 2008). Late photography can therefore be a means of avoiding political commitment. Yet it is the very courting of ambiguity and the 'distanced perspective' (Kemp, 1989, p.103) of a particular kind of picturesque aesthetic that might also enable the late photograph to effect a productive opening up of meaning. An apparent withdrawal from events into their aftermath and into a photographic form that does not appear to comment upon, or try to understand these events does not necessarily constitute a withdrawal from politics. By avoiding the story-telling function

¹ This photograph can be found on Norfolk's website in the series 'Israel/Palestine: Mnemosyne': <http://www.simonnorfolk.com> (accessed 17.8.2014)

of press photographs, Norfolk's image might create possibilities for meaning beyond the binaries of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The deadpan look of this photograph and its context within the world of art-photography perhaps limits its potential to generate political meanings, but at the same time, these factors also limit the possibility of its co-optation into existing political rhetoric.

Is there a way in which such a photograph could contribute to the production of an imaginative no-person's-land between the polarised political positions related to Israeli-Palestinian conflict? A place from which it is possible to understand the self-image of the suicide bomber as someone resisting the Israeli occupation, as well as Israeli desires for security in relation to terrorist attacks, while at the same time refusing the full political logic of both positions. The suggestion here is that the openness of the late photograph allows for an unfixing of meaning in terms of relationships between established ideological positions and visual motifs. This relative unfixing of relationships between motifs and meanings makes the late photograph seem unviable as a means of representing social conditions and political processes, yet it also makes it full of metaphoric potential. The refusal of explicit political meaning therefore goes hand in hand with openness towards meaning; the two cannot be separated and thus the meaningful potential of the late photograph may not be realised. Yet as Jacques Rancière suggests in relation to Sophie Ristelheuber's 2004 series of photographs of IDF roadblocks in the West Bank (Ristelheuber, 2005), photographs like Norfolk's still hold the possibility of enabling the viewer to distance themselves from the 'shop worn' effects of animosity, indignation, and despair that define established relationships between visual images and political understandings in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 'instead explor[e] ... the political resources of a more discrete effect – curiosity.' As a result, such photographs might generate 'breathing room' and 'loosen the bonds that enclose ... possibility within the machine that makes the "state of things" seem evident, [and] unquestionable.' (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007, p.261) Referring back to Kratsman's point, it is therefore between the showing and hiding, or more precisely, between the presenting yet not declaring of late photography, that a kind of 'breathing room' might be developed. The results of such image production are unpredictable, but the extreme ambiguity and perhaps unreliability of late photography is precisely the characteristic that is important here. From Rancière's perspective the artist with a political intention

should not try to overtly politicise, inform, involve, or emancipate the spectator, but open up a space within which spectators can function as people making their own meanings from new aesthetic experiences (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007, p.258). In an interview from 2006, Norfolk discussed the relationship between his work and photojournalism, stating:

I didn't get fed up with the *subjects* of photojournalism – I got fed up with the *clichés* of photojournalism, with its inability to talk about anything complicated. Photojournalism is a great tool for telling very simple stories: *Here's a good guy. Here's a bad guy.* But the stuff I was dealing with was getting more and more complicated – it felt like I was trying to play Rachmaninoff in boxing gloves.

(BLDGBLOG, 2006)

In opposition to such clichés, Norfolk sought to develop a form of war-photography that finds a 'more complicated way to draw people in' (BLDGBLOG, 2006). Norfolk's photographs appear to be far from complex, instead, like most late photographs, they are formally reductive. Yet, it is the formal simplicity of these photographs that might allow for something 'more complex' to happen through the encounter between them and the spectator. Through their straightforward presentation of the details of aftermath sites, late photographs seem to resist commentary and at the same time give a kind of licence to the viewer to engage in imaginative interpretation. The openness of late photography might place too much responsibility upon the spectator. It is always possible that such photographs might be appropriated to affirm existing political orders, or that they might encourage the kind of numbness to politics that Company suggests is one of their consequences. But this openness also allows the spectator to potentially appropriate the aesthetic resources provided by the late photograph in ways that are not conservative or numbing. There is no guarantee of this, but there is also nothing about the late photograph that necessarily, or fundamentally rules this out.

This discussion of the spectator leads back to the subject of memory, for it is the relationship between the remnants of the past recorded in late photographs and the spectator's active interpretation of them in the present, that is the key to the meaningful potential of late photography. The rest of this essay will explore this subject further, initially through the work of the British artist Angus Boulton and then through the photography of the Israeli artists Roi Kuper and Gilad Ophir. The starting point for this discussion is a

statement by Norfolk in which he comments on the motif of the ruin within European art history, stating that 'the ruins in these artworks were not examples of dreamy-headed pictorialism but profound philosophical and political metaphors for the foolishness of pride; for awe of the Sublime; and, most importantly to me, for the vanity of Empire' (2006, p.6). This is not an especially new observation. It is commonly understood that the romantic cult of ruins was not only defined by concerns with the attractiveness of decay and irregular form, but also with what Christopher Woodward calls the 'Ozymandias complex' in relation to which, ruins functioned as a kind of *vanitas*, or 'exemplary frailty' that pointed to the inevitable decline and fall of the powerful (Woodward, 2001; Edensor, 2005a, pp.11-12). Norfolk's comment works along these lines, suggesting that the ruins pictured in late photographs are not just traces of the past, but instances where the past intrudes on the present in a meaningful way. If we consider this in terms of Walter Benjamin's ideas about non-historicist approaches to the past, we can think about late photography as a means through

which 'the past [can] bring the present into a critical state' (Benjamin, 1999, p.471). The appropriation of late photographic images by the spectator might therefore involve the establishment of a critical relationship between the past and the present, turning the pictured remains of past events into metaphors for the challenges and political problems of the current period. Such appropriations are founded on the intention of the photographer to engage in a kind of memory-work by selecting particular subject matter. However, what the spectator does with the resulting images necessarily departs to some degree from the intentions of the artist.

Military landscapes

Between 1998 and 2006, Angus Boulton took two series of photographs at former Soviet military sites around Berlin, grouping these photographs under the headings 'Warrior' and '41 Gymnasia' (Boulton, 2007). The interior and exterior shots of the 'Warrior' series depict military structures in states of decay.



Fig 2.2.1. Angus Boulton, *Kindergarten, Krampnitz*, 17.10.2000. Photograph, 51 cm x 61 cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

A photograph of a kindergarten at Krampnitz in Brandenburg depicts a peeling propaganda mural showing loyal Soviet youth and a portrait of Lenin that has almost entirely peeled away (Fig 2.2.1). Soviet ideology has literally flaked from the wall. Other photographs in the series present scenes in which wallpaper has become detached from walls, detritus covers floors, and the weather has penetrated interior spaces. Sites of former military power are now spaces of absence in which bombastic political and military rhetoric is compromised by the general impression of decay. The gymnasia photographs depict similar scenes of degradation and damage. These images attest to the fall of Soviet military power and by implication to the triumph of the West in the Cold War contest. Yet, following Norfolk's suggestion that pictures of ruins can be allegories of the folly of empire, these photographs can also function as metaphors that bring into question the political and military orders of the present. The question such photographs might raise is: if this powerful military order fell into ruin, then why not those of the contemporary period? The potential message of Boulton's work is that there is nothing permanent about even the most apparently permanent forms, whether hardened concrete bunkers, or epochal geopolitical systems. All of these are subject to the vicissitudes of time. Boulton's images can therefore function as metaphors for the contingency of all military orders.

For decades, the political imperatives of the Cold War were generally unquestionable and defined the broad political context of life in Europe and elsewhere. Since then, we have lived through a different era defined by the 'War on Terror' and its aftermath. Like the Cold War, this new geopolitical framework depends on fear and enmity, and a kind of permanent state of emergency. Bringing this new order into a comparative relationship with the Cold War might allow for the development of a critique of the political and military agendas the citizens of liberal democracies are being asked to support. This would involve memory-work that rescues the Cold War past in an effort to produce alternative understandings of the present, bringing the past and present together in a new constellation. In line with late photography in general, Boulton's photographs do not entail overt political messages, instead, they make the physical traces of the past visible in such a way that the spectator might re-imagine their relationship to the present through the past. This reading of Boulton's images obviously does not take us to their essential meaning, rather it demonstrates the metaphoric potential of these particular examples of late photography.

Similar observations can be made about the project undertaken by Roi Kuper and Gilad Ophir between 1996 and 2000 in which they photographed disused military sites in Israel and the Occupied Territories under the heading *Necropolis* (the city of the dead). This project was intended as a means of commenting upon the high status of the army within Israeli society (Kuper and Ophir, 1998, p.2). Since the foundation of the Israeli state in 1948, the military has been conceived as the institution that, above all others, would forge the national community (Sternhell, 1998, p.327). Thus, David Ben-Gurion declared in 1948: 'Today the ministry of culture is the ministry of defence' (Shapira, 1997, p.653). It was on this basis that the army was set up as something sacrosanct: as a duty, a right of passage, and a source of much of Israel's political leadership (Luttwak and Horowitz, 1975, p.184). On this subject, Israeli leftist Roni Ben Efrat has stated: 'The army has always been Israel's most important institution ... it occupies an enormous chunk of the Israeli psyche. No cow has been more sacred. Above all political debate, it has brewed a strange mixture of national values, seasoning callous brutality with doses of moral righteousness' (Ben Efrat, 1999, p.20). Israeli society is structured by an intimacy of the civil and the military. Military service is compulsory, and contributes significantly to personal identity and social status. It is this familiar enmeshment of civilian and military life that the photographs of the *Necropolis* project were meant to make strange, taking locations that have been ordinary elements of Israeli social experience while undertaking military service and recasting them as something uncanny.

A photograph taken by Kuper at a deserted army base, near the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim in the West Bank, shows a bunker in a state of disrepair (Fig 2.2.2). The paint on this structure is flaking, the ground is strewn with rubble and detritus in a way unimaginable within a working military order; a mass of barbed wire and bent corrugated iron blocks the entrance to the building that is dark and uninhabited. Other photographs by Ophir depict an abandoned airfield littered with discarded items, an army camp overgrown with vegetation, and collapsed military buildings (Ophir, 2001). In these images, ruination disrupts the normative ordering of the military world in a way similar to the break down of ordered materiality discussed by Tim Edensor in his work on industrial ruins (2005a). In his words, ruination generates 'alternative aesthetics' that 'have no sanctions on how they might be used or interpreted' (2005b, p.317). When pictured in late photography, these ruins are re-presented through a particular photographic mode, making them images that allow a different kind of open interpretation.



Fig 2.2.2 Roi Kuper, *from the series: Necropolis*, 1999. b/w print, 120cm x 120cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.



Fig 2.2.3 Gilad Ophir, *from the series: Necropolis*, 1999. b/w photograph (shot on b/w film), 120cm x 150cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

By picturing the abandoned locations of the army, the *Necropolis* photographs were meant to show the military as something ephemeral and fragile. In Ophir's terms, sites that had once been the loci of military power could be viewed as 'vacant' and 'emptied out' (Ophir, 1999). (Fig 2.2.3) The photographs can therefore be understood to have a similar effect to Danny Kerman's 1979 cartoon in which an Israeli peers inside the Roaring Lion of Tel Hai to find that this symbol of national military prowess is hollow and vacant (Zerubavel, 1995). The black and white film used for the photographs enhances this emptying out and de-familiarising effect, while also emphasising the status of the locations pictured as the remains of past activity. In this way, military order is not only represented as disrupted, but as something of the past.

This visualisation of the military in terms of the fragments of past activity needs to be contextualised within the specific era of its production. The *Necropolis* project might be understood in terms of the general emergence of critical attitudes towards the military on the part of some Israelis after the relative military failures of the October 1973 War and especially since the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (Maoz, 2006, p.230), but its direct context was the Oslo period, after the signing of the 'Declaration of Principles' between Israel and the PLO in 1993. For Kuper and Ophir (Kuper, 2007a), the *Necropolis* project was envisaged as something that found its meaning in relation to Shimon Peres' notion of 'The New Middle East', articulated in his 1993 book of the same name (Peres, 1993). This was the era of the 'peace process' that was meant to lead to the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and consequently to demilitarisation. The *Necropolis* photographs were therefore intended to picture the remains of the military past to suggest an expected demilitarised future. The strangeness of the remains of the past in these pictures also referred to the unfamiliarity of a future in which the military was revealed as a hollow solution to the political problems facing Israeli society. However, if we consider the project from the retrospective vantage of the aftermath of subsequent outbreaks of military violence - the second *Intifada*, the 2006 war in Lebanon, and the attacks on Gaza since 2008 - it becomes apparent that the metaphoric potential of the *Necropolis* photographs can be re-appropriated in terms of a different understanding of the recent history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This history would be one defined by continuities of conflict and military violence.

To think about the relationship between the *Necropolis* project and this continuing history of violence it is necessary to divide the photographs



Fig 2.2.4 Gilad Ophir, from the series: *Necropolis*, 1997. b/w photograph (shot on b/w film), 120cm x 150cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.



Fig 2.2.5 Gilad Ophir, from the series: *Necropolis*, 1997. b/w photograph (shot on b/w film), 120cm x 150cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

into two groups. The photographs in the first group depict sites of disorder created by neglect and disuse. These are the photographs that most obviously suggest an emptying out effect, implying the precariousness of military power in the way already discussed. The photographs in the second group picture the effects of what might be described as a kind of latent violence. These photographs depict captured Jordanian vehicles used for target practice in the Negev (Fig 2.2.4), a military training area in the Golan Heights (Fig 2.2.5), and a former Syrian army camp used for target practice, also in the Golan. All these structures have been penetrated, or cratered with small arms fire. The vehicles and the villas have suffered gradual destruction, while the concrete surfaces of the Golan training area have been repeatedly damaged and refaced (Kuper, 2007a). Rather than evoking the fragility of the military,

these images suggest its continuing basis in violence. Here we have pictures of latent violence from the past that suggest violence against the Palestinians in the present and the likelihood of continuing conflict in the future. In particular the photographs of the training area in the Golan have potential connotations that refer to the military present as well as the military past. Unlike most of the sites pictured in the *Necropolis* project, this training area was still in use at the time it was photographed and is similar to other training sites used to prepare particular IDF battalions for 'urban warfare' of the type that occurred in the Jenin refugee camp and elsewhere during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 (Reinhart, 2002, p. 114) and later in Gaza. The latent violence that has marked these mock buildings is echoed in what can be defined as applied violence. Bullet holes and craters in buildings are recurrent signs within the photographic record of warfare and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. Viewing the photographs of the training area in the Golan might therefore involve an intervisual dialogue with other images of past and current conflict that suggest continuities in terms of Israeli military practices that suggest the ever-present possibility of the outbreak of violence as opposed to peace. The past therefore projects into the present and potentially into the future in a way similar to that suggested in relation to Boulton's photographs.

This discussion of relationships between past, present, and future in terms of the photography of Kuper and Ophir can be expanded by looking at a later series of pictures Kuper took of the Keziot detention camp run by the IDF in the Negev. This camp, nicknamed Ansar III by Palestinian inmates after two notorious Israeli army jails in Gaza and Southern Lebanon,² was established during the first *Intifada*. Between 1987 and 1993, about 70,000 Palestinians were held in Administrative Detention at the camp under very poor conditions. Palestinians were forced to live in tents within fenced compounds and thus exposed to extremes of temperature. As the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem observed in 1992, Ansar III was visually 'shocking' to visitors due to the 'large size of the camp' and 'its makeshift appearance' (B'Tselem, 1992). By the time Kuper and Ophir visited Ansar III in the late 1990s as part of the *Necropolis* project, the camp was long closed. But even then, it was a disturbing sight. As Kuper has observed, it was a 'terrible place' (Kuper, 2007a). In 2003, Kuper returned to Ansar III and took a series of colour photographs, concentrating on the detention areas.

2 Inmates also dubbed Ketziot 'the Camp of Slow Death' (Torres, 1988).

In April 2002, parts of the camp had been reopened. Although now surrounded by concrete walls, the reopened compounds reused the original canvas tents and other equipment, contributing to their run-down infrastructure (International Federation for Human Rights, 1993). Because these compounds were currently guarded, Kuper had to take his pictures of the derelict areas of the camp quickly, without using a tripod (Kuper, 2007b). This means that the Ansar photographs differ in particular ways from Donovan Wylie's photographs of the Maze prison taken over an extended period of twelve months and involving fourteen separate visits to the site (Wylie, 2004, p.7). Wylie was able to produce a systematic documentation of the Maze, mapping out its architectural and topographical order through multiple photographs of different aspects of the site. Kuper took a limited number of photographs of Ansar III in a short period of time, resulting in a relatively unsystematic record of the camp. Despite the speed with which they were taken, the Ansar photographs share characteristics with other examples of late photography. Some of the photographs adopt a frontal approach (Fig 2.2.6), while others, taken from a watchtower, give a topographical overview of the site (Fig 2.2.7). These photographs present the viewer with a bare visual record of the detention camp. However, they also include large sections of blue sky that give the photographs an attractiveness not present in the black and white *Necropolis* pictures. In these photographs the beauty of the sky contrasts disturbingly with the ramshackle camp below.

For Israeli spectators these photographs perhaps have a greater potential for disturbance than the *Necropolis* pictures. The Ansar photographs depict the remains of architecture built to suppress Palestinian resistance to the occupation, while also suggesting analogies with other historical events. In the late 1990s, Ophir found himself unable to photograph the actual detention areas because of the visual analogy they presented with the sites of the Nazi concentration camp system. As a child of Holocaust survivors, this aspect of Ansar III was a disturbing reminder of traumatic family experiences (Ophir, 2007).³ Kuper has also described visiting Ansar III as an experience that was like having 'the images of the Holocaust in front of your eyes' (Kuper, 2007a). Moreover, because Kuper photographed Ansar III when it was in a process of transition from its mothballed status, readings of the photographs are necessarily defined by relationships between the past – signified by the remains of the

3 Kuper did take a number of black and white photographs, but these have not been exhibited or published as part of the *Necropolis* project.



Fig 2.2.6. Roi Kuper, *from the series: Ansar*, 2003. Colour print, 120cm x 120cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.



Fig 2.2.7. Roi Kuper, *from the series: Ansar*, 2003. Colour print, 120cm x 120cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

first phase of the camp's history – the moment of the photographic act in 2003, and the present period in which the camp has been made fully operational again. Consequently these photographs might be thought about in relation to Robert Smithson's notion of 'ruins in reverse', a phrase he used to describe the process through which new buildings are constructed, part of which involves a transitional stage in which these new structures appear to be like ruins (Smithson, [1967] 1996, p.72). However the case of the *Ansar* photographs is more complicated. Here the spectator is presented with images of a site that has been allowed to partially fall into ruin, but that will soon experience a reversal of this process. It is because of this transitional moment between past and future use that Kuper was able to produce these rare pictures, without which there would be almost no visual record of Ansar III. This is why Ariella Azoulay used smaller prints of two of the photographs as 'documents' in her 2007 exhibition 'Act of State', which constituted a photographic history of the occupation.⁴ These photographs of Ansar III in a moribund state can now function as reminders of what is currently happening out in the desert, as much as they work as vehicles for memory.

As the opening discussion of late photography argued, there is nothing secure, or final about the interpretation of the *Ansar* photographs suggested in this essay, nor should there be. With such open images it is all a matter of active reading. Late photography might encourage curiosity and imagination in contrast to established ways of thinking, picturing, and seeing. Yet such photographs might also be recuperated into established formations of memory and identity. The *Necropolis* photographs, for example, might be found to be compatible with memorialisation practices that canonise Israeli military history. The late photograph might also be rendered irrelevant by its indirectness. This point is affirmed by Kuper's experience at the award ceremony for the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture Prize for Arts in 2004. When he received this prize from the conservative Likud Minister Limor Livnat, one of the *Ansar* photographs was projected onto a screen behind the stage. Artists in the audience laughed, but Livnat seemed oblivious and ignorant of what she was seeing (Kuper 2007a and 2007b). Having made this observation, it needs to be reaffirmed that, for all their ambiguity, the *Ansar* pictures and their predecessors in the *Necropolis* project present photographic representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that avoid familiar images of stone throwing

youths, bombings, checkpoints, and the West Bank Wall. These standard motifs are enmeshed with the 'architectures of enmity' (Gregory, 2004, pp.17-29) that make it difficult to envisage a solution to the conflict. Images of occupation, victim-hood, and resistance, presented through more conventional photojournalistic, or documentary modes can be important forms of advocacy that contribute to projects seeking justice, but they can equally feed a binary structure that degrades empathy, or fixes the combatants into stereotypical roles of victim and perpetrator. The witnessing of the *Ansar* photographs is muted. Yet, these images suggest a need to reflect on the hidden crimes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their replication in the present. They also open up possibilities for the metaphoric linkage of historical episodes that are usually treated as being completely separate, at least within an Israeli context. Spectral images of the Nazi camps might therefore haunt the spectatorship of Kuper's photographs. Most of all these images, like those of the *Necropolis* project, demand that the spectator shoulders the burden of interpretation: that the spectator finds possible relationships between these pictures and political imperatives for themselves. As already noted, this reliance on the spectator is perhaps problematic and requires further exploration as new forms of late photography are developed. Yet, the value of these photographs is that they involve the generation of aesthetic resources that open up possibilities for reimagining relationships between past and present. What is more, the late photographic mode does not have to be reserved to the picturing of the aftermath of an event. In relation to this one can consider a series of photographs of the former Gush Katif settlements in the Gaza Strip taken in 2005 by Miki Kratsman and Eldad Rafaeli, photographers primarily known in Israel as photojournalists.⁵ Influenced by the *Necropolis* project, Kratsman and Rafaeli took black and white pictures of unpopulated areas of the settlements (Rafaeli, 2007). These photographs were intentionally related to current events. Kratsman and Rafaeli visited the settlements prior to the imminent Israeli 'disengagement' from Gaza in August 2005 and photographed areas of housing that were unoccupied and in a state of disrepair (Fig 2.2.8). Their aim was to contest the focus in the Israeli media on the withdrawal as a great compromise and loss for the nation. In this instance the aesthetic resources of the late photographic approach were mobilised as a means of commenting on events that had not occurred yet.

4 Act of State: 1967-2007 [An historical exhibition], curator: Ariella Azoulay, Minshar Art Gallery, Tel Aviv, 7 June - 11 July, 2007.

5 This series of photographs were displayed under the heading 'Territory' in the exhibition Disengagement at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in April 2006.



Fig. 2.2.8 Miki Kratsman, *Territory*, 2005. b/w photograph, 90cm x 90cm. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

The 'small moraines' of memory

In his novel *The English Patient*, Michael Ondaatje (1993, p.92) describes the passage of the Allies through Italy during the Second World War, observing that the movement of the battlefield across the landscape left behind the 'remnants of war societies ... small moraines left by a vast glacier.' This metaphor describes well the effects of military activities on physical landscapes, both at times of peace and war. Armies are large organizations, that create a variety of social and environmental effects, marking the landscape in particular ways, often for decades. Civilian buildings can be damaged and destroyed, natural landscape formations can be eroded, or put out of bounds

by mines and other unexploded munitions, military architecture can be left in place along with all sorts of other material remains. In the aftermath of military conflict, or after the military machine has moved on from a particular site, these 'small moraines' of military history exist in a kind of temporal limbo. They are of the past, yet they are in the present. As Boulton observes, these traces of the military past in the landscape are 'overloaded with metaphors' (2006, p.38). Military remnants are obviously not literally metaphoric. Rather metaphors are what people can make of them. The point is that the material remains of military pasts are replete with the potential for meaning. Late photographs constitute

pictorial interpretations of military landscapes that can enable the actualisation this reserve of meaning by the spectator. For all the pictorial detail in which they often render the materiality of the world, late photographs are not premised upon a notion of photographic empiricism. Instead late photographs involve the transformation of military landscapes into what might be termed landscapes of the mind. As such late photographs are not simply documents, or objects of a disinterested aesthetic contemplation. Instead they exist somewhere between these poles. These photographs connect us to historical events and processes. But we encounter these events and processes through their aftermath. This creates a viewing position that is structured by a relationship between connection and distance.

The bullet scars on the concrete structures of the IDF training area in the Golan, photographed by Kuper and Ophir, can connect the spectator to the action of military training and through this to the action of actual combat. Yet there can be no immediacy to the sense of connection to military history formed through looking at these photographs. This lack of immediacy might be thought about in relation to Slavoj Žižek's suggestion that sometimes it is good to resist the desire to act immediately, or demand immediate action in relation to intractable political situations. Žižek observes (2008, p.6): 'There are situations when the only truly "practical" thing to do is to resist the temptation to engage immediately and to "wait and see" by means of patient, critical analysis.' Late photography presents pictorial opportunities for this kind of slowing down and stepping back from political situations that are defined by an overabundance of immediate and often disastrous reactions. Here slowing down is not just a matter of the time it might take to contemplate the detail presented by late photographs, but also the possibility to imaginatively locate oneself as a spectator in the limbo-like stasis of their *lateness*.

Physical landscape is often contested. It is fought over, occupied and divided up according to military power and political desires. These sovereign contests over landscape not only result in the political reorganisation of space, but also leave physical remains. These remains are sometimes invested with meaning through their transformation into memorials, or through their pictorial representation. Most nation-states have generated sites and emblems of memory in which military remains are taken to hold crucial meanings about the national past. Military sites are inserted into patriotic narratives and transformed into cultural technologies for the production of loyal national subjects. As such, these sites become part of

the contest over the past that is part-and-parcel of the political struggles of the present. As Dubravka Ugrešić observes (1996b, p.34): 'The political battle is a battle for the territory of collective memory.' This means that it is not only physical landscape that is contested, but also the relationship between landscape and memory. The value of the work of late photographers like Boulton, Kuper and Ophir is that they picture unnoticed, or forgotten military sites in ways that make it relatively difficult for the resulting images to be appropriated for heroic narratives of national and imperial endeavor. By picturing the decaying remains of military pasts, these photographs have the potential to 'speak' to spectators of the fragility of military and political structures. Yet, as has been discussed in this essay, other late photographs can potentially problematise heroic national narratives by reminding the spectator of the ongoing violence of military and political orders. Such photographs open up the traces of this violence for interpretation in ways that might depart from standard attempts to legitimise the use of force by the state. Thought about in this way, late photographs can be understood as images that have the potential to both contest and generate memory as part of the political struggle over what the past means for the present and consequently for what is yet to come.

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